



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.08

Voluntary Report – public distribution

Date: 1/20/2004

GAIN Report Number: PO4002

Portugal

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

New Scrapie Strain Identified in Portugal

2004

Approved by:

Lloyd Fleck
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Leonor Ramos

Report Highlights:

The British reference laboratory at Weybridge has confirmed two TSE cases in Portuguese sheep and has issued a provisional diagnosis of a new variant of scrapie. 1 USD = €0.78.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Madrid [SP1]
[PO]

FIRST CASES OF SCRAPIE FOUND IN PORTUGAL

The Government of Portugal has just announced the identification of two cases of a new variant of scrapie in two sheep, of which one raised in a farm in northern Portugal, and the other imported from Spain for slaughter. Both cases had been detected three months ago by routine brain testing of slaughtered sheep and goats over 18 months of age; these tests are required by the national Plan of Surveillance and Control of the “epizootic sheep tremor” set up in coordination with the EU. According to Portuguese veterinary authorities (DGV), neither of the animals, aged 24 and 26 months, showed any clinical sign of the disease. After the quick Eliza tests carried out at the slaughter plant revealed the presence of Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) samples from the animals were tested in the Portuguese National Laboratory. After confirmation, they were remitted to the Weybridge reference laboratory in the U.K. where, according to the EU legislation, all cases of new diseases must also be confirmed. The Weybridge laboratory confirmed TSE but reported that the brain lesions observed did not show the typical pattern of scrapie. The laboratory later issued a provisional diagnosis that defined these two cases as a new scrapie variant. In order to be able to give a greater assurance of the diagnosis, the Weybridge laboratory will carry out further analysis.

These are the first cases of scrapie detected in Portugal. As a consequence, local sanitary authorities have implemented the measures required by the TSE legislation in force: sequestration of the small farm where the Portuguese-born animal was raised and slaughter and brain sampling of all co-habitants. The results of all these tests have been negative, but the authorities continue to research all relevant epidemiological features, to trace back the Portuguese case to its origins, and to determine all relevant circumstances to understand the pathology's occurrence. According to local veterinary sources, there are other suspect cases under investigation.

The announcement that these are scrapie and not BSE cases has also soothed local public opinion. The Consumers Defense Association (DECO) has already reported that it is too soon to recommend any precaution regarding consumption of sheep and goat meat. Nevertheless, it also has encouraged the authorities to clarify potential risks to consumers, emphasizing the need for the Portuguese Food Safety Agency to come into force.

Sheep and goat production is the least significant livestock activity in Portugal, accounting for a value of production estimated at €166 million in 2002, compared to €380 million for cattle, €380 million for poultry and more than €430 million for hog production. The 2.92 million head national sheep inventory is located on 71,000 farms, most of which concentrated in the Alentejo province.

For analysis of official documentation and updates on the new scrapie variant in Portugal, see the EU Commission website, at

http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/bse/testing/bse_results_en.html.

1 USD = €0.78